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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 FREETOWN 000456

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CH](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: NEW CHINESE AMBASSADOR TO SIERRA LEONE SINGS SAME
OLD SONG

REF: A. FREETOWN 147

[1](#)B. FREETOWN 208

[1](#)C. FREETOWN 350

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador June Carter Perry
for reasons 1.4(b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Perry met with the new Chinese Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Qui Shaofang, on September 10, [1](#)2008. The discussion centered on areas of mutual interest and concern in terms of bilateral relations with the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and development issues and opportunities. Ambassador Shaofang is optimistic that the Koroma administration will bring positive change to Sierra Leone, and stated his government's intention to continue providing support with infrastructure and agricultural projects. Ambassador Shaofang's comments exactly parrot those of his predecessor, which supported development ideas in rhetorical principle and belied actions that were clearly in their own national and commercial interests. While Ambassador Shaofang noted the increased cooperation and communication between our respective governments, it appears unlikely at this point that his diplomatic angle will include greater transparency regarding Chinese priorities and interests in Sierra Leone. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Ambassador Qui Shaofang, China's new envoy to Sierra Leone, paid a courtesy call on Ambassador Perry on September [1](#)10. Ambassador Shaofang's most recent posting was in Sydney, Australia, but he also held positions at the Chinese Consulates in New York, San Francisco, and Chicago (Note: As reported in reftel C, this is Shaofang's first tour in the developing world. End note.). Ambassador Shaofang made special mention of the new American Embassy in Beijing, and the nearly completed Chinese Embassy in Washington, identifying them as a symbol of increased closeness between our two countries.

[1](#)3. (U) Ambassador Shaofang has been in Sierra Leone for a month, and intends to embark on a countrywide tour to fully assess political, economic, and social conditions. He stated the need for advanced countries to assist those that are underdeveloped, and outlined several of China's assistance initiatives, including training demonstrations on rice cultivation in Bo, increased assistance to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, and plans for constructing a new office building for parliamentarians. These projects supplement those outlined previously in reftels A and B.

[1](#)4. (U) Ambassador Perry briefed Shaofang on current U.S. Government initiatives, including democracy development and support for human rights, women's rights, and education. She also expressed interest in increased involvement in the health and agricultural sectors. Ambassador Perry encouraged China to focus on job creation and capacity-building as part of their development model, to ensure that the large number of unemployed youths in the country benefit from the opportunities provided, for example, by Chinese construction

projects. Both agreed that stability in Sierra Leone is dependent on the government's ability to address the employment gap, develop reliable water and energy supplies, and attract private investment. Ambassador Shaofang, like his predecessor, sees hope for Sierra Leone thanks to President Koroma's strong and progressive administration.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Shaofang paid highly publicized visits to several of the major cities outside of Freetown over the past month, announcing new projects and donations. This is similar to former Ambassador Wenju's goodwill tour mentioned in reftel A, which was likely designed, in part, to allay growing anti-Chinese sentiment. While Sierra Leoneans tend to focus on the Lebanese community as the primary exploitative foreign presence, the Chinese are seen by many in the population to be opportunistic profiteers, promising small-scale development projects or gifts to the GoSL in return for favorable mining concessions and a blind-eye to illegal activities. This view is not unfounded; for example, a private deal between the Chinese and Ministry of Defense resulted in the donation of planes and small boats for maritime surveillance that cannot be used to target illegal Chinese fishing vessels (the donated boat is only useful on rivers, for example). Ambassador Shaofang's recent tour, as well as the more extensive tour he intends to conduct in the near future, is likely a deliberate media ploy to distract the population from the negative associations attached to the Chinese presence here.

¶5. (C) Comment: In this courtesy call setting, Ambassador Shaofang did not discuss substantive issues or plans, instead highlighting his intent to communicate regularly with the

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U.S. Mission and his hopes for Sierra Leone's future. Post maintains a cordial relationship with the Chinese mission in Sierra Leone, which is unlikely to change based on this initial meeting. Despite the cordiality, however, and the regular Chinese presence at international diplomatic community meetings and functions, very little is known about their long-term agenda and bilateral relationship with Sierra Leone. Given that his comments were remarkably similar to those provided by the former Ambassador in various settings, it appears that Shaofang is following an established party-line with regards to communications with the diplomatic community and will provide only superficial information about their dealings here. End Comment.
PERRY